AVSIM Commercial Aircraft Review

Flight 1/Coolsky Super 80

Rating Guide		
Publisher: Flight 1/Coolsky		
Description: DC-9 -80 Commercial Airliner		
Download Size: 57.4 MB	**Format:** Download	**Simulation Type:** FS 2004
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Introduction

I miss planes of the 70's. Don't get me wrong; aircraft like the B777 or A340 are excellent machines in their own rights, but I prefer the kind of mounts that are governed by the all-mighty-pilot, not some computerized system. Aircraft of those days, despite the advances in cockpit technology they sported, still very much required a good steady hand on the yoke. A supreme example is the Super 80 (also known throughout the world as the MD-81).

First flown in '79, this T-tailed twin was (in my humble opinion) one of the last true pilot's airliner, not to mention a very successful design as a whole. Some 132 examples of this type eventually rolled off the assembly lines, with a further 1000+ of improved variants that followed (MD-82, MD-83, and MD-88).

CoolSky, a company with which I have had no previous experience with, chose this specific type as their very first venture into the add-on aircraft world. In partnership with Flight 1, they give us the Super 80.

Installation and Documentation

With Flight 1 sponsoring this product, not much has to be said about how easy Super 80 is to install. In my opinion, it is the standard in worry-free installation for MSFS add-ons, and I have grown to put aside any doubts as to it's reliability. Follow the prompts and the package finds its way to your FS folder without a hitch. Let's move on.

Test System

CPU: P4 (Intel) – 3.2 GHz
RAM: 2.0 GB
Video: ATI X800XL (256 MB)
Sound – SB Audigy

Flying Time:
35 hours

Requiring special mention is the documentation, and it's heady. Two manuals are provided; the User's Manual and the Operations Manual. The latter truly deserves mention here: At 282 pages, it's amongst the largest I've ever encountered, and one of the very best.

Manual-junkies may now break out the champagne, for it contains every single thing you would want for this aircraft, including general overview of the systems, operational procedures (both general and amplified), checklists, and performance charts. The contents look very authentic, and for the most part, they work well for the machine they cover. RTM is essential for Super 80, and you'll find yourself kicking yourself if you miss this crucial step (especially true for the LTN-311 Navigation Unit).

Exterior

A total of six accurate liveries are included in the Super 80 package, representing the type for Alitalia, Continental Airlines, Pacific Southwest Airlines (PSA), Scandinavian Airlines (SAS), Spirit Air, and Spanair. Repaints are readily available for your download pleasure at the CoolSky website (and the Avsim library as well).

As for the detailing of the external model… lovely. No word better describes the outside looks of Super 80. Looking around, I found myself scouring the textures for shortcomings, glitches, missing obvious items, just about anything to complain about… and came up with nothing. To be honest, this is the first payware Super 80 I've ever owned, but when it comes to the externals, it could very well be the only one I'll ever need. You be the judge.

Up close and personal, and looking as good as ever.

The same can be said for the interior. The focus is on the cockpit, and the VC representation is as good as I've seen. One minor complaint was that sitting in a virtual

cabin is an option that did not make it into the package, and it came somewhat as a surprise to me; in studying the external model, you can actually see into the cabin windows on one side, right through the ones on the other, including the seats that they took time rendering. From the looks of it, some good effort was put in getting some of those details in. Here's hoping for a future patch for the cabin's inclusion.

2D / VC Panel

Score again for Flight 1/CoolSky. I have had the privilege of sitting in many a Super 80 cockpit, and this one has got it down cold. As there are several versions of these panels out there (courtesy of individual carrier need and improved technology that came later on), I hunted down images on the web just to make sure, and found an identical set up for a Spanish carrier in Europe. There were no deviations to speak of whatsoever – these panels are virtual clones of those found in an early-era Super 80.

Captain's Main (with drop down menu shown) and overhead in all their glory

The panels you'll find in the add on include Captain's Main, 2 Overheads, Com Panel, Throttle Quadrant, Pedestal, Hydraulic/Lighting, and the LTN-311 Nav Unit.. The panels themselves are accessed through one of two methods. In 2D mode, one can either use Shift + Number combination or hover the mouse cursor over the CoolSky menu icon that is conveniently placed in the upper left hand corner of the screen. In VC Mode, the icon is not provided, so you'll be forced to the Shift combination.

For the control freak in you, the vast majority of the switches, buttons, and knobs are clickable, and the good majority of them have a purpose. Following the trend of MSFS add-ons, what is needed will work. It isn't exactly a Level-D in which the fire bottles will actually put out a fire (although you can still activate those bottles if so desired), but it sure isn't a default 737 either. Complexity-wise, closer to (but not quite) the intricacies of the panels of PSS's Concorde or Dreamfleet's 727 – just hard enough to where you'd better get to know what all those switches are about.

Mad Dog's office – at day and night

The VC is also done very well. The appearance of the cockpit in this view mode and its associate components are great, and holds up fairly well to zooming. It's all very easy on the eyes, AND on the resources as well – there was no appreciable drop in performance. This was quite a pleasant surprise, as it's kind of a given that the more complex world of VC normally gobbles up those resources. A good deal of what is clickable in the 2D mode is interactive here as well, and anything that wasn't didn't amount to much in my book. It would have been nice all to be able to cancel out flashing AUTOPILOT or AUTOTHROTTLE disconnect lights in VC, but it's hardly a flight-threatening shortcoming. All in all, it ranks very highly in my VC lists.

Super 80 Training

A feature I discovered in Super 80 was its integrated Training Center. In a way, it's something of a misnomer, as while it does contain items that are related to learning what to do with the add-on, it contains a little bit more than that. Within, you'll also find the Super 80 Options Window, Aircraft Payload Configuration, and Cockpit Control Configuration for individual phases of flight. But I digress… back to the training, right?

I bring this review to what I consider the single strongest selling point of Super 80. The programmers at CoolSky really take this simulation of an aircraft to a whole new level with an excellent tutorial feature. We're not talking about those predefined flights in which you break out the manual and follow along with the occasional pause, but an all out procedural trainer, talking one through the entire control configuration for ever single phase of flight step by little step (note that it's still up to you as to how to physically fly the plane).

As far as I know, this is a first for MSFS. Finally, someone got it in their head that spending hours hunting down every required switch was not fun (can you imagine a new pilot in your favorite airline being trained in that fashion)? Instead, little pointers and text boxes point out the specific item in question and prompt you what to do, taking all the guesswork out of the long process of getting ready for flight. I cannot emphasize enough just how wonderful this feature is, and it just might set a new standard for MSFS for a while.

Step by step, you'll be shown what to do.

The procedural training feature is quite thorough in itself, covering anything and everything that truly matters. These take-throughs even go as far as to cover the the navigation system of the aircraft as well, a most crucial feature in this simulation where the standard GPS window is not supplied (it wasn't in the first Super 80s, right?). I may as

well have been sitting in a technical training class in some Douglas Aircraft Center. Even when not in use, all the bases are covered in making sure you don't miss that critical switch. An audible checklists is read off by the virtual copilot with the press of the SPACE button, which is a nice immersion bonus.

Flight Model

This was the first complex airliner add-on in which I could explore the flight model inside the same hour of getting it running (note to all: GUIDED COCKPIT TRAINING = GOOD), and given how much I love the Super 80, and was really psyched. Powering myself off the gate at good ol' KSFO (as in backwards - yes, reversing out the gate is modeled), I taxied over to Rwy 1R for a haul down to Puerto Vallarta, some 3 hours away. On my last birthday, my wife bought me time in an FAA-approved full motion B717 simulator (a descendant of the Super 80), and I was please to find that the handling here in it's predecessor, was very reminiscent of that experience.

At 1R with 15 deg flaps, I engaged the autothrottles and let her loose. The experience of rotation was also spot on - these T-tailed twins always seem to need more positive pitch before giving up their grip on mother earth, and Super 80 was no different. Gear up, autopilot on, climbing out at 2000 fpm, waiting for the virtual copilot to call out V2 before raising flaps on schedule. This is one of those instances where you had better know what all those switches and knobs and buttons are for – if you selected SPEED HOLD instead of EPR LIMIT to manage the thrust, you might find yourself (as I did) wondering why the plane refuses to accelerate past 160 kias with anything more than 1500 fpm dialed in.

The autopilot works beautifully once you get to know it. I personally used the KIAS/MACH climb mode to manage the ascent to FL290. Once on course, and using LTN-311 to guide me along (remember – no GPS = Read The Manual), I got her up to altitude, engaged MACH HOLD for a .80 cruise speed. That done, I settled in for the long ride to the Mexican Riviera, enjoying my flightdeck surroundings as much as I did the scenery… well, perhaps a little more.

I started my descent a little early so I could get a little hands-on-stick time with the Super 80. No surprises here – she reacts just as much as I expected a Super 80 to (if my B717 experience was any indicator). She's smooth in maneuvering, with that nice 'touch-of-heavy' quality that anyone might expect of this kind of add-on. Slowing down via speedbrakes seemed appropriate enough (nice sound effect as well), and best of all was when I really slowed down. I let the plane slow below minimum maneuvering speed, let the stall begin to develop, then kicked in full power. Much to my delight (which is weird, considering what I was simulating), those JT-8Ds took some long seconds to develop their thrust, a great emulation of that well known 'slow spool up time' that jet engines are notorious for.

Coming in for landing (I changed to night as I wanted to check out the night textures – also lovely, BTW), I found that the Super 80 was very stable on the approach. With 28 deg flaps set and 125 kias on the speed, she just about flew herself down to the numbers with little difficulty. The nose-up attitude wasn't as high up as I expected, nor remember, but it was close enough. As you flash by over the threshold, listen for a curious little rising tone; it's a proximity warning system tied into the radar altimeter (starting at 50'), and it's an excellent cue as to when to start the flare (the closer to the ground you get, the higher

pitched the tone). How the mains grounded themselves really got my attention – anything less than an absolute greaser and they seem to bounce a bit, taking a moment to settle into firm contact with the runway. Another item was how the nose dropped when the speedbrakes deployed – at a fair clip, not at all like a conventional tailed airliner, requiring a bit of yoke-back pressure to counteract. It was very typical of a Super 80, a plane which I have never witnessed being held nose high in an aerodynamic braking attitude. With all my years of watching this specific type land at my workplace by the pros, this behavior is the closest by type I have ever had the pleasure of experiencing.

Sounds

Sounds are well represented as well. The engine noise is nicely subdued, as one would expect on a plane where those nacelles are mounted all the way to the rear. Cooling fans for the avionics are constantly humming in the background, and the click of switches seems just about right. These are but a few of the audible features of Super 80 that stand out in my mind (trust me, there are more); take my word for it that they coalesce into a sound package that is as pleasing to the ears as the visuals are to the eyes.

Other Items

When it comes to shortcomings, I look for things that really matter. Is the aircraft overpowered? Is there a glitch that causes lockups? Missing textures? (yada, yada, yada) All that said, I could not find any major flaws in Super 80.

Performance

** Baseline Tests Parameters: resolution - 1024x768x32 locked @ 25.0, detail / autogen levels – MAX, traffic – MAX, no weather **

The last major strength of Super 80 is how well it ran on my system. The package ran silky smooth, either in the MSFS default scenery or more complex 3rd party add-on varieties. At the aforementioned settings, the FPS meter refused to dip below the 27 mark in the default world, an unexpected bonus considering how much product was provided. Even using a higher resolution at one of those add-on airports failed to keep this baby in check. Average FPS was approximately 24-25, with a low recorded figure of 22.

Summary

Outstanding! No word better describes Super 80.

It’s a treasure in a world of airliner add-ons, as good as the very best out there that I have gotten some experience on. It’s quality, attention to detail, and performance come together to form a package that has to be seen to be believed.

In my closings, I normally don’t like strong opinion statements, but it is here that I must make an exception to my rule. Airliner fans (not to mention Super 80 fans) be advised –

this is something that should not be missed.

What I Like About the Super 80

- Finely detailed representation of aircraft type... without being overtly complex.
- Well modeled exterior and interior.
- Flight dynamics very believable for this type of plane.
- FLIGHT TRAINING CENTER aid tool.
- Excellent performance and extremely stable.

What I Don't Like About the Super 80

- Not one single thing.

Printing

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Super 80

(adobe acrobat required)

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